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tacular one, and may have been one of the two plays acted before the queen by Juan de Morales and his wife in August of 1603. A play of this type was not intended for the stage of an ordinary theatre, but was probably acted in the court of a palace. Note especially the stage directions on page 10, where the whole company of actors enters "*por el patio*," with Gila on horseback. When they reach the stage ("*tablado*"), she dismounts, and the horse is taken away. Other stage directions might be quoted to support the view that this is no ordinary play prepared for the regular stage, but is just such a production as actors presented before royalty or grandees.

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John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama. By RUPERT BROOKE.
New York, John Lane Company, 1917.

This clever book is in pretty equal proportions amusing, irritating, and instructive. Composed in the most accepted style of the recent 'young England' movement, it is naturally rich in paradox and somewhat poor in manners. One may doubt whether much is gained, beyond reminiscence of Mr. Shaw, by calling the method of dividing plays according to subject—admittedly a useful method—"the method of Professor Schelling and of Polonius," or by complaining that "Dr. Ward throws up hands of outraged refinement" over two unclean and not remarkably brilliant comedies. The ragging of the critics leads to positive misstatement, I think, when it provokes such remarks as the following: "The Elizabethans liked obscenity; and the primness and the wickedness that do not like it have no business with them;" or, "If literary criticism crosses Lethe, and we could hear the comments of the foul-mouthed ghosts of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Webster on this too common attitude, their out-spoken uncleanness would prostrate Professor Schelling and his friends." Now we can be very reasonably sure that two of the poets named would not have cared for the comedies in question—*Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho*; and for causes pretty similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to those urged by our chief critics today. And on the alleged Elizabethan love of obscenity, the recent words of Professor Gayley (*Representative English Comedies*,

vol. III) are far truer than those of Brooke: "The common people of that time did not like the concupiscent play, nor have we any proof that the literary classes hungered for it. . . . Between 1604 and 1625 only one of Middleton's London comedies is acted at Court, and that the least offensive, *The Trick*. But, on the other hand, three of his romantic comedies and the noble tragedy, *The Changeling*, have a hearing there, and, time and again, the best of Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher."

Paradox, often very entertaining, informs not only individual sentences and judgments, but even the entire structure of the book. The real scholarship—and there is a good deal of it—is relegated to a set of Appendixes, 110 pages of fine print on Webster's accepted and putative dramas. The main work, of hardly greater bulk, deals with the immediate subject only in the last two of its five chapters. The first three throw iridescent froth over three huge general topics: "The Theatre," "The Origins of Elizabethan Drama," and "The Elizabethan Drama." They contain much excellent foolery on the subject of art and dramatic criticism in the abstract. The chapters devoted to Webster frequently indulge in similar readable if unsatisfying chatter. A paragraph on the poet's stylistic development peters out charmingly as follows:

I can figure him as a more or less realistic novelist of the present or the last eighty years, preferably from Russia. . . . One can see, almost quote from, a rather large grey-brown novel by John Webster, a book full of darkly suffering human beings, slightly less inexplicable than Dostoieffsky's, but as thrilling, figures glimpsed by sudden flashes that tore the gloom they were part of; a book such that one would remember the taste of the whole longer than any incident or character. . . . But these imaginations are foolish in an Heraclitan world, and the phrase "John Webster in the nineteenth century" has no meaning.

By way of comment one can only quote another sentence of the author: "It is beyond expression, the feeling of being let down such couplets give one."

A book could hardly be more readable. It is a fusillade of poetic snap-shots, sometimes outraging, often transcending criticism: and, on the whole, it sketches the real Webster very clearly. "Webster had always," says Brooke, "in his supreme moments, that trick of playing directly on the nerves;" and again, "Webster's

couplets are electric green or crimson, a violent contrast with the rough, jerky, sketchy blank verse he generally uses." I know nothing finer in the way of psychological summary than these sentences:

"Webster's supreme gift is the blinding revelation of some intense state of mind at a crisis, by some God-given phrase." "And Webster, more than any man in the world, has caught the soul just in the second of its decomposition in death, when knowledge seems transcended, and the darkness closes in, and boundaries fall away."

The traditional temperamental uncertainty of the poet in handling prose marks the style. Sometimes it is almost sloppily colloquial: "The Elizabethan use of blank verse was always *liable* to be rather fine;" "It is often discussed *if* the plots of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are weak." "One or two tragedies that were written in the form of histories," he admits in the course of a slashing denunciation of the history play, "are *some good*; *Richard II* and *Edward II*." Sometimes the reader's delight in the critic's phrasal brilliance is marred by the spectacle of a verb racked and tormented in the lust of vivid effect, and one finds oneself sympathizing with the writer of a recent squib in *Punch* on 'Six Vile Verbs:'

When against any writer
It's urged that he "stresses"
His points, or that something
His fancy "obsesses,"
In awarding his blame
Though the critic be right,
Yet I feel all the same
I could shoot him at sight.

The words objected to—'glimpses,' 'voices,' 'senses,' etc.—nearly all 'feature' Brooke's style, and he does even worse. Marlowe, he says, "*thrilled* a torch in the gloom of the English theatre;" Tourneur's *Languebeau Snuffe* "*poises* one sickly between laughter and loathing." But withal both style and thought are magnificently provocative.

I have done less than justice to the book's scholarship. It should be said that the author appears to have neglected no source of knowledge regarding Webster, either in seventeenth-century literature or in modern criticism. His most specific contribution to

learning is the long 'Appendix A' on the authorship of the play of *Appius and Virginia*, an essay published in a condensed form during Brooke's life (*Modern Language Review*, 1913). He argues that the tragedy, printed as Webster's in 1654 and always since accepted as genuine, is essentially the work of Thomas Heywood. The points made are supported by a careful investigation of Webster's and Heywood's style, and they carry weight. Heywood, with his hand or 'main finger' in two hundred and twenty plots, is *à priori* a likely candidate for the authorship of any dubious play of the time, and much of the linguistic and metrical evidence cited in his favor seems convincing. The question challenges further and very respectful attention.

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CORRESPONDENCE

COMMENTS BY PROFESSOR LANSON

Professor Gustave Lanson spent the past academic year at Columbia University as the official representative of the University of Paris and conducted courses in French literature during both semesters. In addition to this work, he visited several universities in the United States and Canada, and gave lectures at these institutions. When the Modern Language Association met at Princeton last December, M. Lanson came in touch with a large number of his American colleagues, whom he addressed at one of the sessions of this annual gathering. His remarks on that occasion were taken down by one of his former students and are here reproduced so that they may be available for the readers of *Modern Language Notes*.

MESSIEURS :

Je vous remercie de votre accueil ; j'en suis d'autant plus touché que je sais à quoi il s'adresse. Votre applaudissement si chaleureux va par-dessus ma tête à quelque chose que vous voulez bien aimer : la civilisation française. Je n'ai pas qualité pour vous parler au nom de qui que ce soit, mais je puis cependant vous dire qu'on sait en France votre sympathie pour cette civilisation et pour ce qu'elle a accompli, et qu'on en est touché et reconnaissant.

Je dois maintenant vous avouer mon embarras. Quand votre aimable président m'a demandé de parler à la suite de M. Schinz, je me suis dit que je ne savais pas un mot du sujet. Je ne me dérobe-rai pourtant pas. J'obéirai, je me dévouerai, je me jetterai à la nage